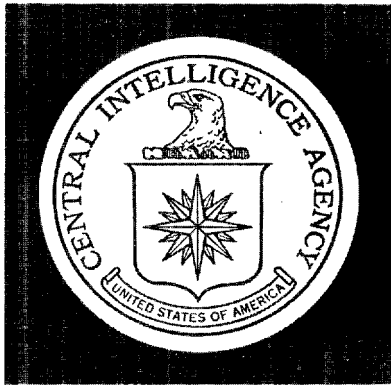


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*North Vietnam's Ability
to Withstand Manpower Attrition*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
June 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

North Vietnam's Ability to Withstand
Manpower Attrition

Summary

This memorandum analyzes North Vietnam's ability to withstand manpower attrition at the very high levels sustained during the first five months of 1968.

Manpower losses are placing a heavy burden on North Vietnam but have not exhausted its manpower reserves. Even if losses are sustained at their present high levels, North Vietnam can maintain the combat forces in South Vietnam at their current strength well beyond 1969. It could, at least through 1968, probably also significantly increase Main Force strength levels by increasing infiltration or deploying additional new units. The sharp acceleration of manpower inputs into the South and the need to sustain them over extended periods of time will, however, produce increasingly severe strains on North Vietnam. Both military and civilian morale may decline, and the combat effectiveness of the Northern troops sent South will suffer. In addition, North Vietnam will have to sacrifice even greater elements of its most prized human resources.

The present and prospective manpower drains may have influenced Hanoi's shift to the current fight-talk strategy in an effort to achieve a decisive outcome in a relatively short period of time. In the final analysis, however, North Vietnam's willingness to bear this manpower burden will be

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determined by the extent to which Hanoi feels that its effort is moving the war toward a satisfactory solution. Hanoi's strategy in short will be dictated more by political judgments than by simple questions of physical capability.

Enemy losses in North Vietnam, Laos, and South Vietnam have reached record levels during 1968 and are running in excess of 32,000 a month. More than 90 percent of these losses take place in South Vietnam. Because the Viet Cong have only a limited recruitment capability -- an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 a month -- most manpower replacements must come from the North. This requirement has forced Hanoi to mount an unprecedented infiltration effort. At least 150,000 persons have been placed in the infiltration pipeline, and an estimated 60,000 to 80,000 North Vietnamese troops arrived in South Vietnam during the first five months of 1968. If the present trend continues, total infiltration could reach 240,000 by the end of the year.

The limits of estimated Viet Cong recruitment capabilities would indicate that North Vietnam might have to provide as many as 260,000 to 300,000 men a year to replace all losses -- in the North, in Laos, and in the South. This requirement seems excessive because the losses in the South may be overstated or include personnel in low-order irregular units. Nevertheless, it is estimated that infiltration to the South will be adequate to replace losses among regular combat units and to provide for some expansion of the force structure.

A possible requirement to furnish as many as 240,000 men to the South and to make up losses in the North and in Laos will force North Vietnam to dig deeply into its manpower reserves. The estimated requirements far exceed the annual draft input of about 120,000 males. To furnish the remainder North Vietnam has several options. It can draw down its in-country military establishment, but, unless it is willing to go into the strategic reserve, this option would provide only about 50,000 troops. It could also widen draft age limits for military service. A large part of this manpower -- from about 25 to 30 percent -- must come from the civilian labor force which contains an estimated

mobilization pool of 500,000 physically fit males. It is estimated that this drain will not be excessive as long as North Vietnam can continue to import increasing amounts of foodstuffs and consumer goods from its Communist allies.

The interplay of infiltration, recruitment, and losses has brought about sharp fluctuations in the strength of enemy forces since 1 January. However, the net change from 1 January to 30 April has been an increase of only about 10,000 troops. An analysis of current infiltration patterns and loss rates does not enable firm judgments on the extent to which the force structure will be further increased, either nationally or in specific regions. It is apparent, however, that further expansion is under way. Whatever the rate of infiltration, it will, at a minimum, be adequate to give the Communists a continuing ability to maintain pressures against Allied forces and urban areas such as Saigon.

I. Assumptions

This analysis of North Vietnam's capability to withstand manpower attrition is based on the following assumptions:

1. The level of combat during 1968 and 1969 will result in enemy manpower losses at the extremely high rate sustained during the first five months of 1968.

2. Manpower requirements must be met completely from resources within North Vietnam and South Vietnam, with no manpower inputs from third countries.

3. The present bombing of North Vietnam will continue, and, because of uncertainty about future bombing programs, the North Vietnamese will not feel free to disband the civilian labor forces or air defense forces organized against the bombing program.

4. The North Vietnamese will attempt to furnish manpower without reducing their strategic reserve, estimated to be about 300,000 troops.

II. Present Manpower Distribution

A. North Vietnam

1. Military Forces

The North Vietnamese are estimated to have about 500,000 men in the Regular Armed Forces and another 400,000 in the militia/security forces as of 1 April 1968. About 35,000 of these troops are deployed in Laos; an estimated 115,000 to 130,000 regular troops and support personnel are deployed in South Vietnam.*

** These are independent CIA estimates of the strength of North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam. As estimates they tend to be higher than the strength levels derived by conventional Order of Battle techniques.*

The North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam are a significant element of the total enemy combat strength in South Vietnam. They account for about 70 percent of the organized strength of Main and Local Force units.

2. Civilian Labor Force

North Vietnam has an estimated 10.4 million people in the 15-to-64 age group. Excluding the 500,000 in the armed forces and the approximately 120,000 students 15 years of age and above, the civilian labor forces comprises about 9.8 million. The number of civilian workers that have been required to offset the effects of airstrikes on North Vietnam is estimated to be about 600,000, including full-time and part-time workers, both male and female of all ages. Nearly a third of these workers are occupied full-time in the reconstruction and maintenance of lines of communication and in the movement of supplies. The part-time civilian force required for war-related tasks is used primarily as conditions warrant in civil defense activities, bomb damage repair, and movement of supplies.

B. South Vietnam

The Viet Cong have established an organized insurgency base that numbers roughly 500,000 people, including the NVA troops in South Vietnam. This insurgency base includes organized military and irregular units as well as the political infrastructure. Less than half of the people are full-time personnel in the organized military and irregular units that constitute a true military threat. The remainder includes large numbers of older people and youths as well as women, most of them organized on a part-time basis. Although they are vital to the functioning of the VC infrastructure and are important for support of military forces, they do not constitute offensive military threats.

III. Manpower Availabilities

A. North Vietnam

1. Annual Additions

Of North Vietnam's population of 18.7 million at the beginning of 1968, approximately

2.8 million are males within the draft ages of 17 and 35. About 1.5 million of these draft-age males are believed to be physically fit, and about 500,000 are already in the armed forces, leaving a potential military manpower pool in the civilian labor force of more than one million physically fit draft age men. During 1968, slightly less than 200,000 will reach the military service age and an estimated 120,000 of these probably would be fit for military service. Although total forces have increased only slightly since the beginning of 1967, induction at an annual level of 100,000 to 120,000 was almost certainly continued during 1967 to replace normal attrition and the greatly increased Communist losses in South Vietnam. If Communist losses continue at the level of the first five months of this year and if the North Vietnamese replace these losses, the estimated 120,000 physically fit men reaching draft age this year will fall far short of meeting these demands. Three alternatives are available to make up this deficit: (a) further reducing in-country forces; (b) tapping the physically fit civilian manpower pool; or (c) widening the draft age limits for military service.

2. In-Country Forces

The current Joint Staff/DIA estimate is that North Vietnam probably considers about 300,000 of the present in-country forces necessary to provide for defense of the homeland. This basic defense force includes six infantry divisions, air and coastal defense forces, and command and logistics elements. A force of about 50,000 would be available for out-of-country deployment during the last half of 1968. This diversion of 50,000 military personnel would be a one-time nonrecurring input to the Communist force level in South Vietnam until such time as the original units were regenerated in the North.

3. Civilian Labor Force

North Vietnam has a civilian manpower pool of nearly one million physically fit draft-age males. An estimated 500,000 of these could be mobilized from the civilian labor force for military service without grave disruption to the economy.*

** In addition, many of the 120,000 students above the age of 15 could be put to work to replace draft-age laborers not now in military service.*

As with the drawdown of in-country military forces, the drains from the labor force would be a one-time nonrecurring gain for the armed forces and when exhausted could not be regenerated.

Labor could be drawn from several sectors of the economy. The North Vietnamese labor force is largely unskilled, underemployed, and, at least in agriculture, seasonally unemployed. Agriculture (including animal husbandry, fishing, and forestry) employs about 7 million people, or almost 70 percent of the civilian labor force, and is particularly labor-intensive. It is estimated that at least 200,000 workers could be drawn from agriculture without a decline in agricultural output because of the low average productivity of North Vietnamese farmers. Moreover, additional labor can be withdrawn from agriculture by substituting imported food for lost domestic production. Of the approximately 800,000 in the industrial labor force, about 600,000 are engaged in handicraft activities. Probably about one-fourth of these could be diverted to the armed forces without a significant loss in essential output. Consumer goods would be scarcer, but increased imports could be at least a partial offset. It is estimated that 10 percent of the 1.1 million workers in the trade and services sector of the economy could be diverted to the military establishment with only a slight effect on the economy. Much of the labor in the trade and services sector is engaged in marginal occupations such as personal services, sanitation work, and the like. These workers can be easily replaced by less trained people, without serious economic disruption.

B. South Vietnam

Since the beginning of the year the Communists have substantially increased the South Vietnamese population under their control and, consequently, the manpower available for recruitment. Although the Communists claim that by the end of March 1.6 million people had been "liberated," US population control data indicate that the figure probably is closer to 1 million. At the end of 1967, the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) recorded 2.8 million people under VC control. At the end of March 1968, the HES data recorded more

than 3.1 million under VC control. An additional 720,000 were added to the contested category. The VC are able to draw on this base plus other population groups not directly under their control.

IV. Manpower Losses

Losses sustained by Viet Cong/North Vietnamese enemy forces have been running at unprecedented rates during 1968. On a monthly basis, total manpower losses have exceeded 32,000 a month, more than 90 percent of these taking place in South Vietnam.

A. South Vietnam

According to MACV estimates, Viet Cong/North Vietnamese forces have lost more than 145,000 men during the first five months of 1968. This estimate includes all causes -- killed, died of wounds, disabled, died of sickness and accident, deserted, defected, and captured. We believe this estimate is high enough to include those lost from airstrikes, losses during infiltration, and would note that it probably includes large numbers from the insurgency base outside the Regular Forces. The average monthly rate of 29,000 is in contrast to a monthly rate of about 13,000 during the last quarter of 1967.

B. North Vietnam and Laos

It is estimated that the forces within North Vietnam lose personnel, through such causes as disability, retirement, and losses resulting from air attack, at a maximum annual rate of about 10 percent. This amounts to about 35,000 a year, or a monthly rate of about 3,000 persons. North Vietnamese civilian and military losses resulting from air attacks have been negligible since 31 March because of the reduced level of bombing.

There is little information with which to estimate the attrition of enemy forces in Laos. For purposes of this estimate, it is assumed that the forces in Laos experience annual losses of about 15 percent, or about 5,000 troops.

V. Current Manpower Replacement

A. Viet Cong Recruiting

Primarily because of the large rural population now under Viet Cong control, the Communists in South Vietnam have apparently been able to come by sufficient manpower to replace most of the heavy 1968 losses in Viet Cong organizations. But the average quality of these forces has declined somewhat. We believe that present Viet Cong monthly recruiting is on the order of 7,000 to 10,000. The Viet Cong have resorted to an increasing degree of coercion in its recruitment program during the last few months. To the extent that the need for coercion may portend an inability to keep recruitment at the 7,000 to 10,000 level then the drain on North Vietnamese manpower could become even greater than estimated but still would not exceed North Vietnamese capabilities.

B. The Flow from North Vietnam

North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam in 1968 has already assumed unprecedented proportions. The full extent of this activity is not known, but about 25,000 men in organized units arrived in South Vietnam since 1 January. Analysis of Rear Services traffic has enabled us to estimate that about 250 battalion-size groups have begun to infiltrate since the first of the year. On the basis of the evidence available, it is estimated that at least 150,000 North Vietnamese troops had been put into the infiltration pipeline by the end of May.

It is estimated that 60,000 to 80,000 North Vietnamese troops arrived in South Vietnam during the first five months of 1968, and the number may be significantly higher. All of the troops now engaged in infiltration movements should have arrived in the South by the end of August. The peak in arrivals will probably occur during June and July. On the basis of these movements, it is estimated that infiltration for the first eight months of 1968 should average about 20,000 a month. If the present trend continues, total infiltration

could be 240,000 by the end of the year.* By way of contrast, North Vietnamese infiltration -- organized unit and filler -- is estimated to have been on the order of 100,000 in both 1966 and 1967.

VI. Manpower Replacement Capabilities

A. Quantitative Aspects

Total estimated enemy manpower losses during 1968 are heavily weighted by the MACV estimates of losses in South Vietnam, which account for more than 90 percent of the estimated average monthly loss of 32,000 persons, or more than 380,000 for the year. The MACV estimate of 29,000 losses a month includes in it a substantial number of laborers and other civilians as well as persons in lower order irregular elements such as Self-Defense Forces and Assault Youth. Thus they should probably be regarded as an overstatement of the manpower that must be provided to maintain the strength of the regular military forces.

It is impossible to differentiate between losses sustained by regular combat units and other categories of organized forces or civilians. The available evidence on current recruitment efforts as well as infiltration movements makes it apparent that the Communists are intent on and have the capability of maintaining the strength of regular combat forces and guerrillas at their pre-Tet levels.

Recruitment in South Vietnam is estimated to have averaged about 7,000 to 10,000 a month thus far in 1968. Unless Viet Cong control over its population base is significantly eroded, this rate can probably be maintained, giving the Viet Cong a total manpower input of from 80,000 to 120,000 for 1968.

** Losses among infiltrating personnel from all causes are estimated to be on the order of 10 percent. We believe that since the MACV loss estimates are large enough to include infiltration losses there is no need to reduce the estimate of the infiltration flow to South Vietnam. A few of the infiltrating groups are probably destined for service in Laos and the North Vietnam Panhandle.*

With this capability in the South and assuming that the remainder of the manpower burden must be assumed by North Vietnam, then Hanoi must provide from 260,000 to 300,000 personnel.

Quantitatively this burden is within North Vietnam's capabilities, as shown in the following tabulation for 1968 and 1969::

	Thousand Persons	
	1968	1969
Annual draft	120	120
Military redeployment	50	
Drawdown from civilian labor force	90 to 130	140 to 180
<i>Total</i>	<i>260 to 300</i>	<i>260 to 300</i>

These manpower requirements imply a draw-down of the civilian labor force of about 110,000 in 1968 and 160,000 in 1969. This is roughly 25 to 30 percent per year of the 500,000 laborers estimated to be available for mobilization. A large number of these would already have had some training, being members of reserve or militia units. Thus the quantitative limits of North Vietnamese manpower would not be exhausted by the end of 1969 and indeed could be continued for at least another year or two.

The provision of this much manpower implies that North Vietnam would replace all losses, regardless of the type of forces sustaining them. This is doubtful because, as noted above, many of the casualties are sustained by low-order irregular elements or civilians. If, however, infiltration is maintained throughout the year at the higher rates observed during the first eight months -- 20,000 a month -- then North Vietnam could move South as many as 240,000 troops during 1968. Most of this infiltration is almost certainly intended to refurbish regular combat units and is dictated by the amounts necessary to keep these forces at current levels.

It should be noted that about 40,000 of the estimated losses are sustained by forces in North

Vietnam and Laos. They do not enter into the infiltration estimate. When they are subtracted from total losses, the maximum call on North Vietnamese manpower to serve in the South is from 220,000 to 260,000. These figures are roughly consistent with the projections of infiltration for 1968. Since a flow of this magnitude would not be designed to replace all losses in South Vietnam, it must be regarded as an indicator of a decision to expand somewhat the NVA force structure in the South. Current intelligence on the possible arrival of new units indicates that the NVA force structure may, indeed, be undergoing some further expansion.

B. Qualitative Aspects

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In general the information on the age distribution, extent of training, and physical fitness of North Vietnamese troops infiltrating South Vietnam since the beginning of 1968 is still too sparse to enable a firm judgment to be made about reductions in physical and training standards. The use of personnel either below or above normal draft age limits is not a new phenomenon, although

it may be increasing somewhat. About 20 percent of troops infiltrating during 1967 were over 35, and a few teenagers also have been noted previously. Similarly, there were reports in late 1966 and mid-1967 of personnel being infiltrated into South Vietnam with less than six weeks basic training. Since a large number of the current infiltrators are reserves or militia personnel with previous training, a six-week training period may not be inordinately low.

Available evidence suggests that groups entering South Vietnam during 1968 have experienced the same problems as in previous years. A study based on documents from 1966 and 1967 indicated that permanent losses from all causes during infiltration were on the order of 10 percent. Most of these resulted from sickness. Air strikes and desertions each accounted for about two percent.

Prisoner and defector interrogation reports have always contained references to poor morale and low motivation. The reporting in 1968 interrogation reports has not differed enough from previous years to warrant a firm judgment of any significant or general decline in the quality of recent infiltrators. Although the reporting does indicate some further decline from that noted previously, it does not yet seem to reflect a serious problem particularly when other evidence is considered. To the extent that quality has deteriorated, it may partly reflect the limitations of the North Vietnamese training base.

The evidence is not sufficient to make a hard judgment of the extent of decline in the physical and training standards of 1968 infiltrators. There is increasing evidence, however, that regardless of quality there has been a decline in morale and fighting effectiveness. Training obviously has an important influence on morale as well as combat effectiveness. Some draftees have not completed a full cycle of basic or infiltration training, and reservists who make up the majority of several infiltrating groups have not received additional training after being called up. A more significant explanation of some decline in combat effectiveness is the fact

that some battalion-size infiltration groups -- at least in the eastern DMZ and around Saigon -- recently have been put into battle as combat units with very little prior training with their assigned unit. The use of new personnel in this manner, particularly in unfamiliar areas, does enable the enemy to maintain pressure on friendly forces in an area of his choosing, but only at a very high cost in personnel losses. There is an increasing body of evidence indicating that the high number of casualties being taken by enemy forces and the fear of air attack contribute to a decline in troop morale and combat effectiveness.

These problems have not yet reached serious proportions, but they must be of some concern to Hanoi. Although the defection rate has been lower during 1968 than it was during 1967, there is a larger share of officers, including North Vietnamese, among 1968 defectors. Within the last month, there have been two instances of over 80 North Vietnamese soldiers surrendering en masse in I Corps. One recent document stated that infiltrated replacements "displayed poor combat spirit and abandoned their positions," adding that "nothing could stop them."

The North Vietnamese are now employing an estimated four divisions and two training groups for basic infiltration training. By employing a three-month training cycle, it is estimated that from 145,000 to 175,000 recruits can be trained each year. By shortening the training cycle or expanding the training base, an additional 50,000 to 60,000 recruits could be trained. Since the number of infiltrating thus far this year exceeds the number that could have been trained during the same period and because only a small drawdown of trained in-country forces has occurred, it is probable that the training cycle has been shortened for some of the infiltrators.

Formal non-commissioned officer (NCO) and officer training schools, as well as the military academy at Son Tay, were abandoned after they were taken under attack by bombing. Officer training classes -- conducted at division level and lasting from two to three months -- are composed of senior NCO's or individuals who have

completed at least seven years of formal schooling. NCO training is no longer mandatory, but some divisions conduct short courses. Soldiers who have good records and exhibit political zeal are eligible to hold NCO rank. The largest single source of junior officers is now believed to be from battlefield promotions.

The North Vietnamese army is apparently experiencing a shortage of trained personnel to fill platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and squad leader positions, and the overall competence of the company-grade officer has declined. These factors are probably the result of increased demands of the air defense effort, the upgrading of several brigades to divisions, and the requirement to create additional divisions, regiments, and supporting elements for infiltration into South Vietnam. This quality problem will probably continue to plague the North Vietnamese army. It undoubtedly has caused some reduction in the effectiveness and regenerative capacity of some units.

The fact that the 1968 filler groups are comprised increasingly of men outside of the prime military age group -- many of them young, recent draftees and older reservists -- is consistent with Hanoi's desire not to weaken the quality of the home army. Hanoi, moreover, may be trying to avoid creating a large gap in particular age groups and to husband a share of the superior manpower in each age group. Some evidence of this is the fact that large numbers of prime candidates for lower level military leadership could be found among the student population which has expanded during the past three years, despite the increasing need for troops.

VII. Impact of Manpower Inputs on Enemy Capabilities

Since the heavy February attacks, most of North Vietnam's manpower inputs have come from filler infiltration to offset current losses or to build up units that were weakened during the Tet offensive. The combination of filler infiltration and in-country recruiting/upgrading has probably enabled the enemy to build up his Regular Forces by something on the order of 10,000 men during January-April 1968, despite heavy losses.

The deployment of Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Main and Local Forces did not change significantly during the first four months of 1968. The changes in relative troop dispositions, by Corps areas, seemed principally to raise force levels in the I and II Corps areas. In addition to the movement of at least two divisions into I Corps, the most significant redeployment of troops was the movement of the 325C North Vietnamese Division from the I Corps area into the northern highlands in the II Corps area during March and April. There were small decreases in the relative numbers of troops deployed in the III and IV Corps areas.

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[redacted] at least 150,000 infiltrators have arrived or are expected to arrive in South Vietnam during the first eight months of 1968. Of this number, 60,000 to 80,000 are estimated to have reached the South by 1 June.

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[redacted] it is estimated tentatively that the infiltrating troops arriving in the South during the first eight months of 1968 will possibly be deployed in the following Viet Cong/North Vietnamese military jurisdictions:

	<u>Percent</u>
DMZ/Tri-Thien-Hue area	25
MR 5	18
B3 Front	10
COSVN	37
Unknown	10

This estimate of relative distribution of infiltration personnel tends to confirm that the enemy is deploying replacement and filler personnel to the areas where he has been hardest hit and sustained the greatest number of casualties. The estimated deployment of infiltrating groups does not necessarily represent a significant shift in the enemy's

strategy. The unusually large number of troops apparently destined for the COSVN or III Corps area, for example, seems justified. Viet Cong/North Vietnamese losses in the III Corps area during January-March amounted to 28 percent of total losses. Total troops deployed in that area amounted to 24 percent during the same period. We do not yet have May losses broken down by Corps area, but on the basis of preliminary calculations, it appears that losses in the III Corps area may be on the order of 40 percent. Since the beginning of the year, the enemy seems to have suffered about 50,000 losses -- one-third of the total -- in the III Corps area. Thus the earmarking of about 37 percent of infiltrators for the COSVN area, which may also have responsibility for supplying troops to MR 10 and MR 6 outside the III Corps area and possibly to the IV Corps area, appears to be designed to maintain a constant level of troops in an area that has experienced heavy casualties rather than to increase troop strengths. Although the probable deployment in the III Corps area apparently is not intended to expand the forces in this area, it is obviously designed to retain the enemy's capability to maintain sustained pressure on the Saigon area.

VIII. The Price of Maintaining Force Levels

North Vietnam's manpower losses in support of the war in the South have been high, amounting to probably well over 200,000 men. It is possible that the present manpower drain and the prospects for its continuation have been an important influence on the North Vietnamese in their shift of policy on the war this year. Their decision to move to a "fight-talk" stage in the conflict -- seen in the current Paris talks -- appears to involve a desire to achieve a "decisive" outcome in the war in 1968 if possible, or in 1969 at the latest. Rather than face the drain of a continued long and piecemeal attritional war with the US, Hanoi may have opted for a near maximum effort in the hope that it could force a decisive outcome in a relatively short period of time. It may have viewed such an effort as potentially less costly -- if it could be brought off successfully -- than a continuation of its strategy of prior years.

Having opted for such a course the North Vietnamese will now be under strong pressure to make sure that their gamble pays off, and that the

expenditure of manpower is not in vain. They may thus be more willing to accept some compromises, at least on the less significant elements of a settlement in the South, than they would have been had they attempted to continue along past policy lines. In the final analysis, however, Hanoi's willingness to continue to bear the burden of a stepped up input of manpower to the South will relate primarily to its judgment on extent to which the effort is moving the situation in South Vietnam toward a satisfactory solution.

As the North assumes an increasing role in the fighting, its share of the manpower drain is undoubtedly a matter of growing concern. Nevertheless, Hanoi shows no signs yet of backing away from its commitment and is apparently willing to increase its manpower investment if that is the price of achieving its political goals.

The gross levy on North Vietnam's manpower base will have reached highly significant levels if the inputs observed thus far in 1968 have to be maintained for extended periods of time. The manpower reserves are, however, adequate to absorb this level of attrition well beyond 1969. Hanoi, moreover, has other options that make the quantitative manpower drain more manageable. These would include a widening of draft age limits, additional drawdowns from the in-country military force, a reduction of the air defense and labor forces still kept intact to react to the bombings, and deeper cuts into the civilian labor force. The major effect of most of these measures would be an increase in North Vietnam's vulnerability to offensive military action, an increase in its dependence on its Communist allies for material aid, and additional personal sacrifice and deprivation.

Although a sustained and heavy input of manpower into the South is within North Vietnam's capabilities, there are additional considerations that make the effort a costly venture. These are primarily the long-term effects of substantial manpower losses and the probability of a worsening of morale among military forces and civilians.

Although morale in North Vietnam is adversely affected by results of the fighting in the South, the regime tightly controls the amount and kind of

information made available on the home front. The nature of the war, its direction, and the level of casualties suffered by North Vietnamese is probably not fully understood by most North Vietnamese. This knowledge will, however, be more difficult to conceal as the manpower commitment is sustained and casualties continue to mount. As draft calls continue, the effect on the morale of draft age males within North Vietnam probably is debilitating. By appealing to patriotism and by expounding the theme that victory is within sight, the regime is probably able to minimize the degree of resistance and resentment. The main contact that the average North Vietnamese civilian has with the war is the US bombing in the North, which has caused the separation of families, the loss of possessions, mental anguish, and physical pain. With the cessation of the bombing north of the 19th parallel, the morale of much of the population has undoubtedly improved. To convince the populace of the continuing need for the draft and other sacrifices, the regime is striving to remind the people that the US bombing program continues in part of North Vietnam and could be expanded at any time. There has, for example, been little relaxation of population controls of civil defense programs, and the air defense reaction to reconnaissance flights is vigorous and complete.

Although there are indications that the average quality of North Vietnamese troops has probably declined somewhat, military effectiveness has not yet been seriously affected. Some instances of significant desertion rates amongst North Vietnamese troops in recent weeks, particularly in the Khe Sanh area, have been noted, and there are reports from high-level defectors and prisoners that depict low morale.

The increasing evidence of declining morale among military forces and the likelihood that this will become more pervasive among civilians cannot be overlooked by Hanoi. These problems, however, are not governing for the regime. In a society as rigidly controlled as is that in North Vietnam, it is unlikely that popular disaffection will grow to the point at which it begins to exert a controlling influence on Hanoi's war policies.

The final determinant of Hanoi's willingness to sacrifice manpower will be its judgment of the likely course of events in the South. If the regime is convinced that its persistence can lead (1) to a toppling of the South Vietnamese leadership and the ascendancy of the National Liberation Front or the Alliance, (2) to a weakening of US determination to stay in the war, or (3) to a movement of the Paris talks along paths favorable to Hanoi's interest, the price will seem worthwhile.

APPENDIX

Notes on Methodology and the Data BaseA. Estimates of NVA Forces in South Vietnam

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The upward adjustments are of several types: (1) the addition of new units [REDACTED] and newly formed or newly identified units not carried in the collateral order of battle by MACV because they have not met the criteria for acceptance into the order of battle; (2) the use of estimative techniques to add unlisted support personnel integral to divisions, and (3) estimates made to reflect the enemy's measures through the infiltration process to bring units back to normal strength after losses have been sustained.

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The major benefit of using estimative techniques to estimate enemy strengths is that they tend to eliminate most of the time lag in the acceptance of units into "order of battle" holdings. These estimates are believed to provide reliable approximations of enemy strength for the purpose of national intelligence and policy decisions. They are not intended and could not be used as OB holdings for field command and tactical purposes.

B. North Vietnamese Labor Force Data

According to US Bureau of the Census estimates, there are presently about 10.4 million North Vietnamese in the 15-to-64 age group. By excluding from this total the 500,000 in the armed forces and the approximately 120,000 students of working age, an estimated labor force of 9.8 million is derived. Such a figure represents a rate of growth of the labor force of 2 percent per year above the officially reported 1960 labor force figure of 8.1 million. This growth rate of 2 percent appears reasonable in view of the population growth rate during the period.

The US Bureau of the Census also estimates about 200,000 North Vietnamese males will reach the age of 17 in 1968 and about 205,000 will reach the age of 17 in 1969. Of these totals, at least 120,000 17-year-old males will be physically fit for military service in each of the years 1968 and 1969

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The number of males regarded as physically fit may actually be higher. A recently captured North Vietnamese soldier reported that in 1965 only people with acute tuberculosis and heart disease were excused from the draft for physical reasons.

The following tabulation shows an estimate of the labor force, according to sectors of employment, as of 1 January 1968:

<u>Sector of Employment</u>	<u>Thousand Persons</u>
Agriculture	7,000
Services	800
Industry (including handicrafts)	800
Transport and communications	400
Trade	300
Construction	250
Other	250
<i>Total</i>	<i>9,800</i>

These figures were derived from the official data on the 1960 labor force and from various statements and figures announced by the regime during the last eight years.

The estimated total number of civilian workers countering the air war over North Vietnam amounts to a maximum of about 600,000 individuals, including full-time and part-time workers (both male and female) of all ages. The tabulation below shows that of this total less than 200,000 workers were engaged full time:

	<u>Thousand Persons</u>	
	<u>Full Time</u>	<u>Part Time</u>
Repair and recon- struction of lines of com- munication	72	100 to 200
Transport workers	100 to 120	25
Civilian defense		150
<i>Total</i>	<i>172 to 192</i>	<i>275 to 375</i>

The number of full-time workers on repair and reconstruction of lines of communication (72,000)

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was cross checked by using aerial photography to determine the extent of reconstruction and repair activities. A ratio of two part-time workers to every full-time worker was established from a variety of intelligence sources.

The additional 100,000 to 120,000 full-time transport workers include laborers for the extensive transloading required in bypassing interdiction in the transport system, additional truck drivers and boatmen, and the increased use of primitive transport, particularly for moving supplies south.

The estimate of 150,000 part-time civilian defense workers was based on collateral sources

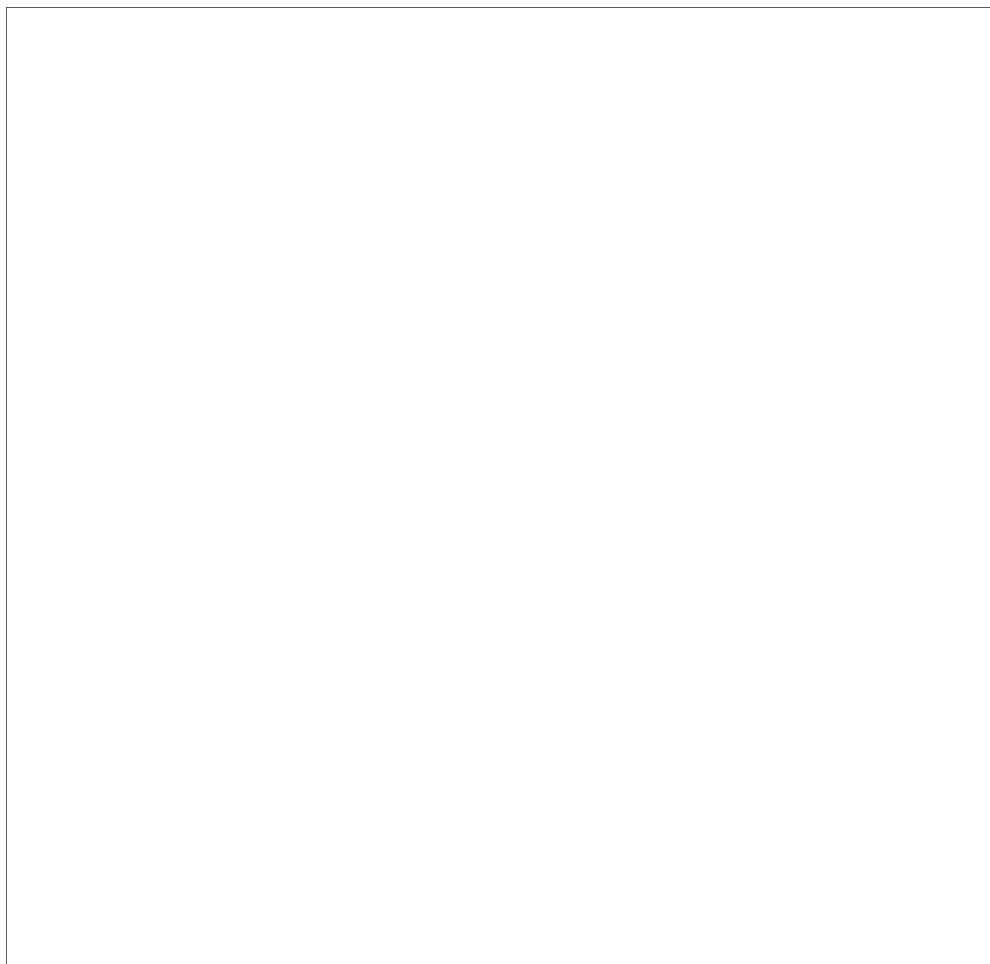
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C. Infiltration Estimates

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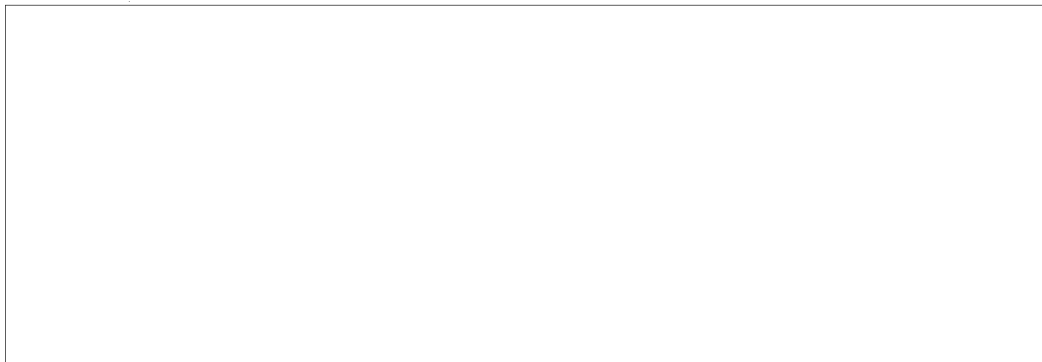
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The method employed in determining the geographic areas of South Vietnam to which infiltrators are being deployed is also the result of analyzing information derived from [redacted] collateral sources. Prisoner reports and captured documents are reviewed to determine the point of arrival for infiltration groups with known numbers to determine any correlation between designation and destination. It was discovered that the first digit of each infiltration group number appeared to indicate specific geographic areas within South Vietnam.



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D. Enemy Losses

Total enemy losses of about 150,000 men during the first five months of 1968 are assigned as follows:

Killed in action (KIA)	100,055
Died of Wounds/ Permanently Disabled (DOW/PD)	32,200
Defections	2,633
Prisoners of war	2,307
Other losses	10,000
<i>Total</i>	<i>147,195</i>

The KIA data are subject to both upward and downward biases. There is, however, no assurance that they cancel each other out. In some situations, an actual count of bodies can be made, but in others, confusing and hectic combat conditions preclude such an estimate. The inclusion of civilians, laborers, and self-defense militia elements in KIA data all tend to overstate the actual number of enemy killed. During February 1968, MACV reduced the total monthly KIA figure by 10,000 to account for what they believed to be

unusually large inclusions of these elements as a result of the Tet offensive. On the other hand, failure to include enemy forces killed by unobserved airstrikes and artillery barrages as well as the enemy's practice of removing dead from the battlefield tend to result in an understatement.

The DOW/PD estimate is calculated by multiplying KIA data by a factor of 0.35 which was derived from a 70-document study done by MACV in late 1966. For the February 1968 data, MACV used a factor of 0.18 on a portion of reported KIA's to allow for a lower DOW/PD to KIA ratio as a result of the urban fighting during the Tet offensive. This resulted in a factor of 0.28 on a countrywide basis for computing a DOW/PD estimate.

Although there have been difficulties in determining the number of detainees permanently detained, prisoner of war and Hoi Chanh data are probably the most reliable elements of the total losses estimate.

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"Other losses" include desertions, permanent losses as a result of sickness and accidents, discharges, and retirements. MACV has carried this total at 2,000 per month since 1967. Although little is known about these types of losses, evidence exists that they may be substantially greater than 2,000 per month. Desertion is believed to be far more common than defection (Chieu Hoi).

Substantial permanent losses also occur because of malaria and diet deficiencies. Furthermore, some military personnel have been active since the Viet Minh days and are becoming too old for strenuous combat duty.

E. Viet Cong Recruiting

The recruiting estimate of 7,000 to 10,000 per month for the last few months is reasonable and perhaps even conservative. The estimate is based on information on recruiting and upgrading activity and on our estimate of the overall strength and losses among the various Viet Cong elements.

Replacements for losses in the Main and Local Forces and Administrative Service troops come from direct recruiting and from upgrading from the Guerrillas. We believe upgrading is a larger source of manpower for the Regular Forces than is direct recruitment. The Viet Cong consider a "volunteer" from a Guerrilla unit as a recruit. In addition to these personnel moving into the Regular Forces, the Viet Cong recruit large numbers for the Guerrillas and other elements of the infrastructure. Many of these are of lower quality. At present, quotas for Guerrillas call for 40 to 60 percent females and 10 to 15 percent teenagers under sixteen years of age. We believe that the average quality of recruits for the regulars has not fallen seriously, because the better motivated and more experienced persons are taken. The average quality of Guerrillas continues to fall, as it has throughout the war. Although the quality of the Guerrilla soldier has decreased, the effectiveness of Guerrilla units has not decreased commensurately, because of the increased quality and quantity of Guerrilla weaponry.

On the basis of an assumed undiminished Viet Cong control over large elements of South Vietnam's population, we believe this rate can be maintained. On the basis of the same indications that we have used, MACV has recently revised its estimate of 1968 recruiting upwards. During the summer and fall of 1967, MACV believed that the recruiting rate had fallen off to about 3,500. After considering the apparent ability of the Viet Cong to replace losses during 1968, MACV has used estimates of between 7,000 and 12,000 in its retroactive adjustments of the order of battle.

F. North Vietnamese Defensive Requirements

It is recognized that the North Vietnamese army has a significant capability to reinforce in South Vietnam with regular forces, should the political decision to do so be taken. The dispatch of most of its division-size forces would, for

example, lead to a greatly stepped up enemy war effort along more conventional lines, with its resultant increased casualties, logistic requirements, and the like. If the North Vietnamese were to make such a decision, they would leave themselves open to the threat of an invasion. While they might hope that their regional forces and militia would be able to bear the initial brunt of such an invasion, they would be unable to contain an invasion and would probably have to recall sizable forces from South Vietnam or invite the Chinese to defend them.

In addition, they would be stripping the North of a major portion of the army's training base. The deployment of such sizable forces would create logistical requirements beyond the capability to sustain them in conventional combat, unless the bombing campaign were stopped.

For the purposes of this memorandum, therefore, we are assuming that a prudent North Vietnamese government faced with a threat of a US invasion would want to maintain at least six divisions and other forces in a position to counter any invasion, about 300,000 men. These forces would be needed to cope with the threat of an Inchon-type landing or an armored thrust north of the DMZ and to provide a North Vietnamese training base.



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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

JCSM-364-68
11 June 1968
TS 189080

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Subject: North Vietnam's Ability To Withstand
Manpower Attrition (U)

1. (S) Reference is made to your request of 10 June 1968 for the comments of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on a draft intelligence memorandum, subject as above, to be transmitted to the President along with your memorandum.
2. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have reviewed the draft memorandum and have noted that the estimate of North Vietnam Army troops in South Vietnam is somewhat higher than the 90,000 to 93,000 currently accepted by MACV. In view of the uncertainties caused by the impact of the current high level of infiltration, however, any estimate of these forces would be tenuous and would be subject to continuous refinement.
3. (TS) On balance, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are in general agreement with the judgment that manpower losses have not exhausted North Vietnam's reserves and that, under the assumptions advanced and with present operating restraints, Hanoi can maintain the combat forces in South Vietnam at their current strengths beyond 1969. It is also believed that continuing heavy manpower requirements will produce increasingly severe strains on North Vietnam, but there is as yet no indication that these developments have reached the point where they are influencing Hanoi's determination to carry on the war. Thus, in the absence of actions or developments to increase attrition, the arithmetic does not support a hope that a pure attrition battle can be won in 2 years.
4. (TS) Nevertheless, the prospect of continuing heavy losses cannot be attractive to the enemy unless he believes they will pay off. Weighing the costs of protracted war, it may well be

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that he intends to bring the contest to final issue long before 2 years have gone by. If this is the case, and there is increasing evidence to support it, he may have already organized and trained larger forces than we know from the one-half million manpower reserve available to him now. If this turns out to be the case and if 1968 is the year of decision, then long-term attrition estimates are not meaningful except as they may have influenced his decision to go for the main chance now.

5. (TS) On the other hand, if he seeks to retain the option for protracted war - as a hedge against failure in 1968, then raw attrition is only one of his problems. An immediate problem he faces is the relationship between his strategy and his losses. In 1968, he has been losing men (both North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong) at a rate which, if it continues, would produce losses of approximately 350,000 men in South Vietnam. This high-loss rate is the consequence of his offensive strategy, the forward deployment of his main forces, and his effort to achieve a maximum impact in a short period of time. From a military standpoint, we do not believe that he can absorb such losses over a protracted period of time and maintain the level of battlefield effectiveness required to pursue this strategy and attain his goals.

6. (TS) If he does not throw his entire force into a final climactic battle, regardless of casualties, we believe he can be forced back into his bases by allied offensive operations. He still can attack on a selective basis, but the basic dilemma he would face in the long run will not change. If he chooses to withdraw his main mobile forces from the populated areas or is forced out by allied action:

- a. Pressure on the Government of Vietnam will be relieved, and it will continue to gain strength.
- b. Pressure on the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces will be relieved, and they will gain strength and effectiveness.
- c. Enemy access to the population will decrease, and his recruiting will fall off.
- d. The effectiveness of his cadre will diminish as the pressure on it increases.
- e. His hope for an uprising will disappear.

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7. (TS) His long-term military prospects on the ground in South Vietnam against allied forces are not good. His best hope is that through spectacular attacks, even at very high cost in casualties, he can create a short-term image of success on his side and the image of hopelessness on our side. If he can bring about a loss of confidence in the Government of Vietnam through military action or negotiations, he will have achieved a major goal.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:



EARLE G. WHEELER

Chairman

Joint Chiefs of Staff

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